DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 164 462 SP 013 328

TITLE	Practicum Experience Program.
INSTITUTION	Alabama A and M Univ., Normal.
PUB DATE	31 Oct 78
NOTE	12p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Career Choice; *College Supervisors; *Cooperating Teachers; *Education Majors; *Field Experience Programs; Interinstitutional Cooperation; *Practicums; Practicum Supervision; Preservice Education; Program Coordination; Student Teaching
IDENTIFIERS	Early Field Experience

ABSTRACT

This program is based on the recognized need to provide preservice teacher education majors with an opportunity to actively participate in the public school classroom. The program is designed to provide the student with classroom experiences that will assist in deciding if they seriously desire to be teachers, to develop perception of the role and duties of a teacher, and to give an opportunity to implement course-related materials and methods in a classroom setting. At the freshman level the student is exposed to the different educational levels of the school and the roles of the teacher. At the sophomore level the student experiences teacher-related duties in a chosen area and functions as a teacher aide. In the junior and senior years the student is allowed to work in a classroom setting as an apprentice teacher. The functions and responsibilities of the director of the practium experience program, the departmental coordinator, the cooperating teacher, and the university instructor are outlined in this report. (JD)

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PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
ALABAMA A&M UNIVERSITY
NORMAL, ALABAMA

OCTOBER 31, 1978

SP013328

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Summary:

The School of Education at Alabama A&M University has established the Practicum Experience Program as part of its policy to provide a quality and relevant Teacher Education program. The function of the Practicum Experience Program (PEP) is to provide a comprehensive program of pre-student teaching course-related field experiences and to coordinate both undergraduate and graduate field experiences. PEP is also responsible for providing a system of student transportation to facilitate the movement of students to and from their field experience sites.

The rationale for the establishment of the Practicum Experience Program (PEP) is based on the recognized need to provide pre-service teacher education majors with an opportunity to actively participate in the public school education system. The program is designed to provide the student with classroom experiences aimed at:

1. Assisting the beginning students in deciding if they seriously desire to be teachers;
2. Facilitating the development of the students' perception of the role and duties of a teacher from a teacher's viewpoint;
3. Providing an opportunity to implement pre-service course-related materials and methods in a classroom setting;
4. Assisting the students in developing their fullest teaching potentials.

To achieve its specific goals, the Practicum Experience Program (PEP) has been structured with two major divisions--pre-service and graduate. The pre-service division is designed to provide a tri-level pre-student teaching program. The three levels of experiences are sequential and building in nature.

The three types of pre-service experiences are:

1. Exposure--Provide at the freshman level and structured to expose the student to the different educational levels of the school and roles of the teacher;
2. Awareness--Provided at the sophomore level and facilitates the student in experiencing teacher-related duties in his chosen area. This is achieved through the student functioning as a teacher aide;

3. Developmental--This occurs during the junior and senior years and allows the student to work in a classroom setting as an apprentice teacher.

The Practicum Experience Program's (PEP) evaluation system is a formative evaluative design which provides feedback to the student, his instructor and the Program's administration.

To date, the generated data has revealed that the program has made a significant difference in both the student's teacher education choice and the quality of the pre-service program.

PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

The Practicum Experience Program at Alabama A&M University is a major part of the total teacher education program. This phase of teacher training addresses the growing need to give today's educators early exposure to real-life teaching situations. In turn, the Practicum Experience Program serves to make early identification of and cultivate those student traits which lend most to teacher potential.

The Practicum Experience Program (PEP) lends well to the growing demands for accountability on the part of teachers. This early exposure to laboratory experiences gives the student an opportunity to apply the theoretical aspects of teaching, to see problems in their true perspective and thereby adapt more appropriate means to their solution. PEP is the application of teaching-and-learning theory in practice.

The close proximity of Alabama A&M to two large diverse school systems, Huntsville City Schools and Madison County Schools contributes to the success of the Practicum Experience Program. The collaborative efforts of the university personnel and the cooperating school systems' personnel have proven to enhance the program's effectiveness.

The PEP approach to teacher education has received approval from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

The field-based practicum experience is designed to serve as a decision-making tool, thereby aiding students in making career decisions regarding education as a profession. The Practicum Experience Program seeks to assist students in recognizing their own potentials, strengths and weaknesses as related to teaching/learning situations. This is vital for the development of personal perception. Over and beyond the many goals of PEP is the opportunity it affords students in making practical application of classroom theory and to implement pre-service methods and materials.

The tri-level Practicum Experience is designed to build student competence in three sequenced levels--the Exposure level, the Awareness level and the Development

level.

The Exposure level is structured to expose the beginning teacher education student to the different educational levels of the school and the roles of the teacher. This level incorporates the introduction to teacher education course, Education 102. The course includes a two-hour a week field experience in which the class, accompanied by the university instructor, visits a different practicum site each week for eight weeks. The students participate in planned observations directed by the school personnel and in many cases the students themselves. The practicum sites are identified by educational levels and program offerings; thus giving the freshman student in teacher education a broad range of experiences.

The Awareness level incorporates the Principles of Teaching courses. At this, the sophomore level, the students are individually assigned to a school in a chosen area of subject matter concentration. He performs teacher-related duties and functions as a teacher's aide.

The third level is the Developmental level and occurs at the junior and senior years. At this level the student is assigned to an experienced cooperating teacher and works as an apprentice teacher. This level of the Practicum Experience Program is designed for the student to apply the skills and knowledges he will be required to use as a Student Teacher. Student Teaching is the culminating phase of the professional teacher-training program.

The personnel involved in tri-level Practicum Experience Program are: the Director of Student Teaching who oversees all teacher education field experiences; PEP coordinator who serves as a liason person between the cooperating schools and the university; an assistant coordinator who coordinates the departmental level course offerings which gives clarity and minimizes duplication; instructors for field-experience courses who jointly develop course goals, objectives and competencies to be gained at each of the three levels of practicum experience; department chairmen who assist by scheduling course offerings to facilitate the PEP transportation schedule, which coincide with the public school class schedule; cooperating

school personnel who offer their facilities and serve as in-class and field-based resource persons; teacher education upperclassmen who share input from their practicum experiences.

Practicum Experience Program, as a part of the total teacher education field experience is designed so that it does not overlap in time scheduling with the Student Teaching Program. During the Fall semester, the pre-student teaching field experiences are provided during the first half of the semester. During the Spring semester, the pre-student teaching field experiences are provided during the second half of the semester. This scheduling arrangement makes a clear-cut distinction between the Practicum Experience Program and the Student Teaching Program, which is a full-time, half semester (nine weeks) field experience offered the second half of the Fall semester and the first half of the Spring semester. In relation to the Practicum Experience Program, Student Teaching is seen as the culmination of all field-based experience and the total teacher education program.

The management design of the Practicum Experience Program employs a traditional chain of command format with the course instructor providing on-site university supervision of the student's experiences.

PROGRAM ROLES

The cooperating teacher has full supervisory control over the practicum student. Supervision by the University is developed on a cooperative basis, resting entirely on mutual understanding and cooperation among the principals, curriculum coordinators, and the supervising teachers and the University representatives. Our past experiences with principals and teachers in cooperating schools indicate that such a cooperative working relationship can be developed to the advantage of all parties concerned.

THE FUNCTION AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

The director is responsible for the overall program organization and implementation. The primary functions of the director are:

(1) to coordinate all practicum student placements;

(2) to coordinate the Practicum Experience Program for all areas of preparation;

(3) to serve as liaison officer between the University and the student teaching center;

(4) to serve as Chairman of the Practicum Experience Program Advisory Committee;

(5) to work with the Practicum Experience Committee in continuous evaluation of the objectives, procedures, operation and general policies of the student teaching program and other laboratory and field experiences provided for students;

(6) to select with the assistance of the University instructors, practicum centers and cooperating teachers;

(7) to cooperate with University instructors in approving practicum student assignments;

(8) to make the official assignments of practicum students to practicum sites;

(9) to establish and administer, with the approval of the Director of Student Teaching, the Practicum budget;

(10) to develop and distribute to appropriate individuals and areas of the University all forms and materials essential to their effective participation in the Practicum Program;

(11) to apply all approved standards and policies governing PEP;

(12) to keep records necessary for the proper administration of Practicum Experience Program;

(13) to follow national-regional trends, activities and organizations relating to practicum experiences;

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATOR OF PRACTICUM

Each department has one individual assigned to function as its Practicum Coordinator. The role of the coordinator is to take the responsibility for:

(1) the coordination of the Practicum Experience Program in his respective department;

(2) to provide the Director of the Practicum Experience Program with a complete listing of all departmental Practicum course, competencies, students and desired Practicum placements;

(3) to provide leadership at the departmental level, for the continual refinement and improvement of the Practicum Experience Program;

(4) to assist in the supervision of his department's Practicum students;

(5) to provide input into the selection and evaluation of Practicum centers;

(6) to serve as his depratment's representative on the Practicum Experience Program Committee;

(7) to orientate and assist new practicum-related course instructors;

(8) to insure the Practicum students maintain a high degree of professionalism during their involvement with the Practicum;

(9) to help the Practicum course instructor resolve any practicum-related problem;

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COOPERATING TEACHER

The functions and responsibilities of the cooperating teacher are to:

(1) have a clear understanding of the policies and procedures of the Practicum Program;

(2) to provide professionally oriented activities and tasks for the student to participate in as identified by the student's respective course practicum outline;

(3) to orient the practicum student to his role in the classroom;

(4) to provide a professional image for the student to model himself after;

(5) to help the student resolve any Practicum-related problem;

THE FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTOR

It is the duty of the University instructor to:

(1) cooperate with the Practicum Director and his respective department's coordinator in the selection and maintenance of the Practicum;

(2) to encourage and monitor the practicum student's attendance and practicum performance;

(3) help to maintain desirable relationships between the students and the cooperating teachers;

(4) participate continuously in the evaluation of the professional courses in order to effect a more complete integration with desirable practicum experiences in the various fields;

(5) provide the on-campus orientation and evaluation program for practicum students in his course with special references to the teaching field involved;

Periodic planning activities are held with all university personnel involved

in PEP. At which time all facets of the program are discussed. This aids in ironing out problems related to subject matter coordination, transportation logistics, etc. Such planning sessions have helped to minimize transportation and course scheduling conflicts.

The university instructors participate in the field experiences along with the students. This is a most significant part of the program because it brings the university instructors and the cooperating teachers together as a team. As a result, the student benefits from both levels of influence.

The close coordination at the departmental level enhances program effectiveness. The built-in, two-hour block of time for field experiences is coordinated with the student transportation service and the cooperating public schools.

BUDGET

The Practicum Experience Program's source of funds consists of a combination of: a tuition fee which is attached to all practicum-related courses; School of Education funds; and University funds. The PEP personnel are engaged by the program on a shared time basis, with their respective departments assuming their total salary. The following is a budget analysis by cost areas:

Area	Cost
1. Personnel	
a. Director (25%)	$6,000
b. Assistant Director (25%)	4,000
c. Department Coordinators (NC)	
d. Secretarial Assistance (NC)	
2. Travel	
a. Student Transportation System	$6,000
b. Staff	250
3. Office Supplies	$250
4. Xeroxing	$250
5. Communication (NC)	
TOTAL	$16,750

Student Transportation Explanation

The School of Education recognizes that a significant need exists for the provision of practicum-related student transportation. Accordingly, when possible, and financially justifiable, the Practicum Experience Program provides transportation services for students. In response to the overall transportation needs, a uniform bus schedule is designed for each semester, according to said need. The School of Education recognizes the fact that some instructors, due to a time schedule conflict, are not able to utilize the bus service. In such cases, university vans are made available to the instructor.

The transportation cost is defrayed in part by a laboratory fee which is attached to the tuition cost for courses carrying a practicum requirement and by University funds. The transportation vehicles are university-owned or in some cases, where a full-size bus is warranted, the transportation is contracted to a commercial transit company.

The Practicum Experience Program's evaluation plan utilizes a formative evaluation design through which the student, instructor and PEP personnel receive feedback information. The student's field experience is closely monitored by the course instructor and the cooperating classroom teacher. Through the use of the pre-service class discussions student are given the opportunity to constructively analyze their performance and experiences. Additionally, at the end of the experience, the student is formally evaluated by his or her cooperating teacher.

The PEP staff receives feedback data from all the practicum participants and through the use of systematic on-site observations. To further analyze the impact of the experience on the pre-service student, a formal evaluation employing two validated instruments in a pre-post design. The Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory was used to measure attitudes toward teaching and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale was used to measure ten aspects of student self-ceoncept. The results of the formal evaluation revealed that there was no significant change in either the student's

attitudes towards teaching or his self-concept. Though the formal results reveal no significant differences, the formative data reveals a change in student perception of teacher roles and the environment of a public school classroom from a teacher's viewpoint. This change in perception has lead many students to seriously analyze their desire to become teachers. Additionally, course instructors have noted an increase in the student's competency performance levels.

The Practicum Experience Program has helped to cultivate a greater degree of professionalism in the attitudes of students; developed the students' personal resources as they increase in competence and professionalism; minimized the communications gap which often exist between the 'real' school classroom and the university classroom; developed a closer bond between the pre-service teacher education student the in-service teacher and the university teacher; enhanced the Student Teaching Program by involving cooperating school personnel in the teacher education program at an early stage; encourages feedback from all personnel involved in PEP; serves as a continuous evaluative mechanism for improving the teacher education program.

The reactions of participating students, faculty members, and cooperating school personnel has been very receptive. Initially, there was some hesitation on the part of a few cooperating teachers who did not fully understand the distinction between the Practicum Experience Program and the Student Teaching Program.

With greater effort made to orient all persons involved in the program, this hesitation has been minimized. The Director of Curriculum Development for each cooperating school is a member of the PEP Advisory Council. This arrangement gives the Practicum sites a direct link to the palnning and implementation of the Practicum Experience Program.

During the development and implementation of the Practicum Experience Program several major concepts for the success of any pre-service teacher education were identified. The basic principle behind these concepts is grounded in early needs identification and the systematic development of the resultant program. The major

concepts were:

(1) The collaborative development and dissemination of a program which is based on identified needs;

(2) The implementation of a comprehensive communication system including all participants;

(3) The development of an attitude of professional and personal commitment to the success of the program, on the part of all the participants;

(4) The identification of realistic measurable field-experience competencies for students;

(5) The systemization of the scheduled practicum times with course offerings so as to provide the student with an opportunity to participate in courses of his choice while participating in the practicum.